CHRIST : THE LOVE INCARNATE

VINOBA

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Publisher's Note

This booklet on Christ is a collection of extracts from some of Vinoba's speeches delivered during his Padayatra (foot-pilgrimage) in connection with Bhoodan-Gramdan Mission. Christ : the Love Incarnate, makes strong appeal to Vinoba as he himself is a votary of Love and Peace. He holds in high esteem, the son of God, the son of Man and claims that his own work of Bhoodan is only an extension of the message of Christ.

Vinoba, following in the footsteps of Gandhiji referring to Christ points to the problem as to why the human race, 'turns against the Savior hands of Grace, why it meets the sons of God with death and pain' and emphasises on the spiritual essence in Christianity as in other religions as a solution.

We are pleased to note that the publication of this booklet synchronises with the Eucharist Conference which is being held in the first week of December this year in India.

The English rendering of this brochure has been made by one of our colleagues Shri Dilip Singhi whom God has choosen to call back to Him. He left us immediately after he had completed the MSS of this book.

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The period of Lord Christ's terrestrial existence was only 32 years and his term of actual work did not exceed 2-3 years. I suppose that the entire area of his activities was equivalent to that of 3-4 Indian districts. Though his life was so short and his activities confined to so small a region, yet his name and thought have spread throughout the world. There is something in man which makes him rise above himself, above the society to which he belongs and above the time in which he lives. He accomplishes a thing that influences the world for all time to come.

Hirekerur (Dharwar)
25-12-'57

Chapter I

THE SPHERES OF EXPERIENCE AND FAITH

Science has proved that light travels faster than anything else. The speed of light is 1,86,000 square miles per second, but that of mind far exceeds it ; there can be no comparison between the two. There is an entity which we call soul or 'spirit' and that surpasses even the mind. Whoever realizes the soul will have attained power that is boundless, infinite.

The various religions that are current today are called 'Faiths' in English language. The question arises 'Faith in what ?' Man sometimes rises above his body consciousness and attains self-realization. But, that remains a mystery for others ; he alone knows his mystic experiences. Still people follow a man of self-realization and cannot but do that. For, although he cannot explain his experiences in words, yet he can communicate his experience to some extent through his speeche, his way of life and especially his contact. That is why they repose their faith in him. The question of faith does

not arise in case of the person who gets the experience, for, to him the experience is so concrete, so real. Here is the watch ; I see it. It is a matter of experience. I do not say that I have faith in the existence of this watch. But those who have not seen it, need faith. The experience of one does have an impact on others ; it cannot be avoided. The atomic explosions of today affect the atmosphere of the whole world. As a result, several people fall victims to a number of diseases. They not only do not know the cause of their disease but are unable to escape it. Similarly, the self-realization of a single person does have its influence on the world in some measure. Those who are in contact with him, especially inner contact, are influenced more. They accept it with faith. Herein lies the origin of religions. It is because of this that in English language the synonym of religion is 'Faith'.

EXPRESSION OF SELF-REALIZATION

Soul is a very wide term and hence, its experiences too are varied. It is not necessary that one should have the same experience as the other. Everyone is unique in oneself. All experiences are sacred, complementary ; but

they are also varied and find expression in the life of those who have them. Sometimes they find expression in words too, but their scope becomes limited then, that is, they become one-pointed. Human speech is too imperfect a medium to convey the experiences in their entirety. When such an attempt is made, the words do reveal some light but they are also accompanied with a little shadow. That is, if I try to express my self-realization in words, I shall be able to do it only partially ; the moment you attempt to express the Truth through the medium of words, the ray of light gets slightly deviated. That is why, man of Knowledge and self-realized souls keep mum about their experiences. They do not much express them in words but only manifest them in their life. Yet, whenever they speak, it is in a language that is quite understandable to all and what they say is useful to all. Lord Christ, Lord Buddha etc. fall in this category of Great Persons whose number is fairly large.

LET ALL BELIEVERS FORM INTO ONE COMMUNITY !

You will observe that ethics, social welfare and self-purification constitute a major part of

their teachings. In Gita too, in the context of the characteristics *of a man of steadfast wisdom*, Arjun asks as to how he sits, walks, speaks. He does not put the question as to what he speaks, for, there is more to learn from his example than from his words. That is why the lives of these Great Persons cast a spell on the people, which their utterances do not. But as the word *is also a part of life*, we receive *that too from* them, but only as much as could be uderstood.

I have read something about Great Persons in various languages. But what has influenced me more comes from beyond the Word. The very remembrance of these Great Persons rouses feelings of devotion in my heart. These Great Men are a community in themselves ; hence, we believers too should all join together in spirit, irrespective of what Word we follow, what religion we profess.

CHRIST IS NO MORE A PERSON

It can be said that as Christ was crucified, that very process was accompanied with glorification, deification. Hence, he remained no more a man after that ; similar had been the case with Rama and Krishna of the Hindus. Whenever I read from Ramayana, hardly a day

passes when my eyes are not moist with tears. Had Rama been among us today as man, He would not touch our hearts so much. Christ holds the same place in Christendom as Rama and Krishna do in India. This is equally true of Lord Buddha and the Prophet, Mohammed. Though Mohammed repeatedly said, "Brothers, I am only a human being", yet when his soul departed, his followers could not believe that such a thing could ever happen. At last his comrade, Abu Bakar, who later became Calipha had to go up the mosque and tell the people that Mohammed had passed away. Only then people took it to be a fact, for they had faith in the veracity of what Abu Bakar would say. Similar was the case with Lord Christ. When he had been taken to the Cross, he said that he would come back within three days i. e. come back in 'spirit'! It is said that the ladies that had waited there saw that Christ came down from the Cross. Then they told others that Christ had risen again. Lord Buddha is yet another example. He did not even speak of God, although Christ and Mohammed did. Yet people began to recite, "I take shelter in Lord Buddha" in place of 'I take shelter in God'. In short,

those who were glorified or deified thus, remained human beings no more. We cannot have a complete account of their lives nor do we know fully about them.

PLACE OF CELIBACY IN THE LIFE OF LORD CHRIST

Little is known about the first twenty years of Christ's life. Students of history, however, do make conjectures, though there is not much data available nor is it necessary. But whatever I have learnt about his life from the words of Mathew, Mark, Luke and John, this thing has been established in my mind (and that is of greatest significance to me) that the celibacy of Christ had its origin in compassion. He had been so very compassionate that abstinence was the natural outcome. He did not have to pass through rigours to achieve it. When once in a meeting someone said to him, "Look your mother has come", he replied, 'All these women here are my mothers.' It is because of this vast flow of compassion that he could observe celibacy.

I could not grasp this point in my childhood. I understood then that the inspiration for celibacy arose from the quest for Knowledge.

But when I had had the God touch (mental), my attention was drawn to the tenderness and gentleness of Christ's personality. In the modern terminology we can say that he had a woman's heart though this is not a scientific way of saying. The distinctions of gender are with the body not with the soul. But to make things clear to our understanding it can be said that he had the woman's trait in his character and his celibacy had its origin there.

A CELIBATE WOMAN GREATER THAN MAN

It has been said in the Bible, " Be perfect in the image of God ". Man fulfils himself when qualities of woman also enter his nature ; he already has man's qualities. Similarly woman shall be fulfilled when man's qualities are introduced in her nature.

To my mind perfection and complete celibacy are synonymous terms. Those men who strive to lead a celibate life shall have to develop woman's virtues too in them. Only then will they be perfect. Those women who want to be perfect shall have to unfold men's qualities in them. If some man tries to attain perfection in the manner of Christ, qualities like gentleness etc. will grow in him because Christ was the

embodiment of those virtues. If it is a woman who makes such an attempt, I hold that she will outshine even man. For, she already has woman's qualities in her and will, besides, develop *man's too. Hence, I believe that a* celibate woman will attain tremendous power and a celibate man will be extremely gentle.

This is evident from Christ's example.[1*]

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*Figures indicate references which have been shown in Appendix II P. 63.

Chapter II

INDIA ACCEPTS WHAT CHRIST PERSONIFIED

The day when Christ was crucified is considered sacred throughout the world. In fact, all days in God's creation are auspicious. When the sun rises, it ushers in a day of good omen only. That day will be considered an auspicious day in a man's personal life, when he takes some noble pledge, or peforms a noble act or thinks a noble thought. But in the social life, besides these auspicious days of personal significance and all the days of God, there are some special occasions which are considered particularly auspicious and sacred. And these are the occasions when man has a glimpse of human height. That is why people all over the world try to rise above their ordinary self, do some introspection, pray, worship etc., even if it is for a brief period, in commemoration of the memory of Great Men. This is a practice common to all countries, and all religions and communities.

In these days we have created divisions even

between religions ; one community fights with the other, and ill-will prevails between one nation and another. But there have been some saints too throughout the world who were above the notions of country, sect, religion or community and who have shown to us the pettiness of our divisions, disputes, ill-will. Lord Christ too is considered as one of such great souls.

Lord Christ used to speak of himself as 'son of man'. This means that he was not prepared to accept for himself any narrow title, position or rank. He considered himself as a representative of the whole of humanity, i. e. he represented both its strength as well as weakness. That is why he did great penance for the purification of the whole of humanity. He is not only remembered where there are Christians but in other parts of the world too his memory is considered sacred. It is specially so in the land of India.

WRONG PREJUDICES

Perhaps it is a very little known fact that shortly after the crucification of Christ, a mission of his followers came to the coast of Malabar and since then the followers of Christian faith have

been living here. It is unfortunate that Christianity got entagled with the politics of the English, the French, the Portuguese etc. As a result, it could not occupy the high place it should have in India. On the contrary, it suffered from indifference. Subsequently, as it got associated with British imperialism, it began to be misunderstood and prejudices developed against it. All this is very unfortunate.

CHRISTIANITY IS THE RELIGION OF INDIA

Fortunately this prejudice and misunderstanding is now dying out, much of it has already gone. It is time India realizes that Christianity too is a religion of India. I for myself can say on behalf of the whole of Indian culture that Christ is acceptable to India. Whenever Christian friends ask me that we Indians should accept Christ, I declare on behalf of the whole of the country that we accept him and his message, and are eager to live upto that. We take him as one of our family. It is my claim, (and I do not boast, I say it with all humility) that to my knowledge nowhere else was collective experiment of Christ's teachings carried on so extensive a scale as in India under the leadership of Mahatma

Gandhi. It proved to be in our interests that God gave us the wisdom to accept the message of Christ. I hope that this sacred day (X-mus) will be observed as a day of introspection for India and the whole world.

SCIENCE IN OUR FAVOUR

Today there is tension throughout the world. It is painful to have to say that the countries which committed violence on the largest scale against others happen to be the followers of Lord Christ. I believe that this will not go on for long and what Christ had predicted, namely, " The Kingdom of God that prevails in Heaven shall dawn on earth too " will come true in the near future. It does not matter if these countries, relying for their security and the world's on the increase of armaments, do not today realize this thing from the teachnings of Christ, but it is certain that science will compel them to understand it. It cannot go on for long in this age of science that the armament race will continue and they will be able to keep peace through balance of power. Science will not put a limit to the multiplication of arms and hence, it will compel man to think afresh. We will understand, if not today tomorrow, that, after all, the

growth of humanness and welfare of humanity lie in complete disarmament. Both the physical security as well as spiritual development are possible only after that. When man gives up arms, learns to live with mutual co-operation and love, begins to live for others, feels happy in giving to others, then only will there be salvation for him. And science shall make all this a concrete reality.

HELPLESSNESS OF MODERN MAN

There is no merit in loving those who love us. Even animals do that. What is human about it ? Besides, if we love only those who love us and breed ill-will for those who harbour ill-will for us, this means that we pass on the initiative to the opponent. Seeing that Pakistan is increasing its military strength by the help of U.S.A., if India too increased armaments (though we want peace, non-violence and disarmament) this would mean that we allow Pakistan to give whatever shape it wants to India. I have said this only by the way. Today every country tries to increase its armed strength when it sees others doing the same thing. Each fears the other. Helplessly we are moving in a wrong direction, and at the same time we admit that it is wrong.

THIS LACK OF VITAL POWER

All the great men, and ordinary people too, expressed their sympathy on the demise of Mahatma Gandhi. Among them was also the famous General Mac Arthur who had been responsible for increasing the power of violence to the maximum. He said, "If we have to protect humanity, we must think to do that only by composing our differences and by love." Inspite of this, several people feel that it cannot be done here and now. They believe in the truth of non-violence but do not feel like following it as an immediate thing to do. The protagonists of violence say that they do not want violence for the sake of violence. Violence for violence's sake is a characteristic of Satan. There is no human society in the whole of the world which likes violence for its own sake. They only helplessly take recourse to violence because to them there is no alternative left when the opponent uses violence. I call this helplessness, this lack of vitality, a symptom of impotence.

CHRIST WAS A GREAT HERO

Such helplessness was intolerable to Christ. He was a great hero ; he knew no fear. He led

a life of complete celibacy and loved all life. He declared that he would win over even that person with love who had ill-will for him. This is no small courage to say so. No man of lesser strength can speak or think like that. Only the powerful can do it. If we rightly think over it in the context of this age of science, we shall realize that it is not only a question of boldness but of intelligence too. The rational in man says that it is preposterous to try to solve the problems of society through violence. I, therefore, believe that ere long the world will be presented with an opportunity to act according to the message of Christ and it will be a farmer who may do it.

India is fortunate in that all the races and peoples of the world have been living here in love and amity. The people of this land make no distinctions in their thought and ideology. Even the concept of nationalism is difficult of acceptance. It is easy for them to understand internationalism. If it is impressed on any Indian that he should be proud of his province and that he should discriminate with others, he will not be able to follow this line of thought. But if he is told to love all life, (not only human beings) and that to love is a religious duty, then he will

atonce understand it. I, therefore, feel that India has accepted Christ and what he represents.

CHRISTIANS SHOULD ACCEPT INDIAN SPIRITUALITY

The Indian Christians should give an Indian orientation to their faith so that Christianity may be more perfect and that Hinduism, Islam etc. may also become complete. Then will there be a confluence of all religions. Therefore, the Christians, the Muslims etc. of this country who have bonds outside too, should treat each other as a part and parcel of their religion and life.

Let me make myself a bit more explicit. What is behind Christ's preachings, such as 'love thy neighbour', 'love thy enemy' etc.? The question arises, why should we love? The spirituality of India has the answer. If the Christians and the Muslims accept it, their thought will gather greater strength. It will then be easy to propagate the truth of their faiths.

ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY OF INDIA

Islam advocates a sort of brotherhood. This is acceptable to all religions. Service to humanity is a special feature of Christianity. This too is acceptable. I emphasize on the inculcation of both these things in the life of the people and

hence, I consider myself both Muslim and Christian. As an Indian Hindu I say that both Islam and Christianity are acceptable to me. This does not wipe out my Hinduism, on the contrary, it blossoms and brightens thereby. The reason is that the spirituality that has grown here is a powerful entity. Therefore, I want to impress that to give support to the brotherhood of Islam and to the spirit of service of Christianity, both Islam and Christianity should be so oriented that they include in them the strength and sharpness of Indian spirituality. If this is done, both of these faiths will be strengthened and their glow will be more attractive. When they take a form to which the common man becomes receptive, they will have a wide acceptance.

FLESH-EATING WILL HAVE TO BE GIVEN-UP

I also hold that society should now veer round to the view that animals shall not be killed for the palate, that they shall not be considered for consumption as food. If we cannot protect them, atleast we should not kill them for food. This is a special message of India that has its origin in its spirituality. Hence, all the religions born in India have arrived at this conclusion that

the best food for man is fruit and vegetables. The world is short of grain, but for the progress of humanity, for its fulfilment, for harmony between all religions, it is necessary that man should turn vegetarian. We should make all efforts with the help of science that man may produce sufficient grain for human consumption. This effort alone will take us towards perfection.

In short, Christianity is acceptable to India. But the Christianity of India should accept the spirituality of this land. When both meet, they will be fulfilled, and a perfect humanity will manifest itself.[2]

CHAPTER III

INCARNATION OF HUMANITY

The birth-day of Lord Christ is a 'great day' for the whole world. God sent from Heaven a number of saints all over the world making exception for no region whatsoever. He loves all equally and so He sent sages to all climes, lands and peoples with His message.

GOD SENT HIS MESSAGE EVERYWHERE

Human society is divided into thousands of linguistic groups. Men speak different languages. No species of animals has more than one method of speech. The crow will cry out only "Kanv Kanv" irrespective of whether it is from Pakistan, India, China or Russia. It knows only one language—national and international. The same is true of all other creatures. But human beings speak various languages. It is a marvel of God that He was endowed human mind with tremendous power. That is why thousands of thoughts occur to him and he makes thousands of impressions and, as a result, thousands of languages come into being. All these are man's creation. God loves all equally and

so he sent his messengers to the people of all languages.

Just as God sent the Prophet to Arabia and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu to Bengal, He sent Lord Christ to the Hebrews. All these spoke the language of the people. They had physical limitations but their hearts were boundless. Rabindra Nath wrote in Bengali and Tolstoy in Russian, but their hearts encompassed the whole of humanity. That they could write only in Bengali or Russian was because of their physical limitation. But what has happened after their death ? Their books have been translated and are being read by thousands in a number of languages. When alive in flesh and bone, they had their limitations, but after that, they have entered far and wide in society and their spirit has spread all over.

I have cited examples of the time that has just passed before our very eyes. The Great souls suffer from limitations so long as they inhabit the physical frame, but when they throw it off, they become vast as the cosmos. That is true for all whether he is Chaitanya, Christ, Mohammed, Buddha or Lao Tse.

Lao Tse, the Great Man of China, has writen a book wherein he has preached universal love.

That sacred volume is even smaller than the Gita. Lord Christ was born two thousand years back and Lao Tse five hundred years before that. Today all these Great Souls are spreading their light far and wide and are giving ceaselessly their message of love to all.

THE VISION OF CHRIST'S DISCIPLES

There are about 300 crores of people inhabiting the globe. Of them 100 crores are Christians. Christ passed away at the age of thirty three. After him, his disciples who were not very learned, spread his message. They said, "We are not speaking of the man-Christ who lived in flesh and bone but of the son of God who sacrificed his life. We do not ask you to accept the man as your Master. The Christ who was crucified and who manifested himself again and symbolized Truth—it is this Christ that we ask you to accept and follow." Most of Christ's disciples were uneducated. One of them was Saint Paul. And it was he who carried Christ's message of love far and wide.

GREAT MEN PREACH THE SAME TRUTH

If we translate the thoughts of Christ in Bengali and compare them with those of

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, it will be difficult to differentiate between the two. Narrating the characteristics of a gentleman, Chaitanya says : " The servant of God should consider himself a very ordinary person. Just as a blade of grass lies lowest on the ground, so he should be humble before all and consider himself a petty servant. He should be as enduring as the tree. One who fells the tree does so sitting under its shade and cuts its wood with an axe which has a wooden handle, and yet the tree endures it all. In the same way, the servant of God should endure, give up all vanity and respect others.

If the world accepts these three virtues, there will be no more trouble anywhere. The same has been said by Lord Christ ; he spoke of ' Self-suffering ' *i. e.* ' Ye shall endure all and forgive him who gives you trouble '. Whereupon he was asked, " How many times shall we forgive ?" " Seven times ", was the reply. " If even after that the opponent does not behave, what should be done ?" was the next question. To this he replied, " Multiply seven by seven. If even that fails, then multiply again with that number and go on doing that *ad infinitum* ". This is what Christ teaches.

THE FORGIVENESS OF CHRIST

Christ said, "What can be a greater love than the sacrifice of oneself for the sake of friends ? All of you are my friends. I am sacrificing myself for you." When he was put on the Cross, he prayed, "O Lord ! Forgive those who have put me on the Cross, for they know not what they do. They are ignorant. Were it that they had knowledge, they would not commit such an act."

This reminds me of Lord Krishna. When his end came near, he was sitting in a jungle, meditating below a tree, with one leg crossing and supported by the other. His foot was red. In the meantime a hunter happened to pass that way. From the distance he mislook Krishna to be a dear and shot the arrow. It pierced his foot. When the hunter came nearer, he was deeply pained and prayed for pardon. The Lord said, "How are you at fault ? I myself wanted to leave this world ; you have only become an instrument. Do not get afraid. You shall be liberated."

Lord Christ too did the same thing. What a faith in the goodness of man to believe that "man does not sin consciously !" If someone

commits a sin and people hold that he has done it fully conscious of the nature of his action, even then you must believe that he committed it because of his ignorance. Knowledge and sin cannot go together. Believe in this maxim and pray to God to forgive the sinners.[3]

SEVEN EXCLAMATIONS

When Christ was crucified, seven exclamations came out from his mouth. The first was for those who had put him on the Cross. He prayed to God, " Forgive them, my Lord, for they are all ignorant. " The second was for the thief who had been put on the Cross along with him. At first the thief spoke ill of Christ and said, " You have been saying so many things, now do something for me ", but added afterwards, " O Lord, I have sinned, forgive me. " Christ prayed for him and said, " When I go to heaven your place shall be near me. "

The third exclamation was addressed to his disciple, John who had been dear to him and was standing before him. There were a few ladies and gentlemen standing there and among them was Christ's mother too. Christ said, " John, this is your mother ". His mother and his disciple both stood in front of him.

The fouth was a prayer to God in verse. The fifth exclamation was : "I feel thirsty." Whereupon those standing near him gave him water. The sixth was : "Now it is finished." The seventh was : "O Lord, I now surrender myself to you."

Now ponder, how human all this is! Christ's parents had come to see him in the very beginning. People informed him, "Your parents have come to see you". He replied, "All those standing here are my parents," and refused to meet his mother. What an attitude of non-attachment at first! But at his last moment at the sight of his mother, he said to John, "This is your mother," meaning thereby 'you have to take her responsibility!'

Perhaps because she had appeared before him, he thought of her. Otherwise, he would or would not have thought of her. It is difficult to judge the saints. But of all that I had read about Christ at different places in my childhood, only these two things have deeply impressed me : 1. "They are ignorant, forgive them, my Lord" and 2. "This is your mother, John." I consider these seven things as the essence. All this is so human, though it is divine too.[4] ●

Chapter IV

THE ERA OF FAILURE

About two thousand years back a Mahatma said, "Love thy enemy." These words entered man's heart like an arrow, but man could not absorb them. Instead he started an era in the name of that Great Man. Who can wield a greater power than one who does not want to exercise his authority on others nor submits to the authority of any one else? Such was Christ, and in spite of that this era has become a measure of the failure of man as well as of that Great Soul.

The same thing had been said by the Buddha before Christ: "Enmity does not end enmity, only love quells ill-will". People retorted, "There is nothing new in it." Vedas too have said the same thing *viz.* "The good people resist attacks from the evil-doers by sheer endurance." Then Buddha said, "Alright, if there is nothing new in what I preach, then follow it sincerely; if it is new, then follow it with all zeal". Christ made it quite clear, "I have not come to smash old things but only to renew them. Goodness is as old as time, only it has to be rejuvenated."

"Love thy enemy"—what a beautiful and effective device it is! Someone harbours ill-will for me and I should love in return. I have put my camp in the very citadel of his heart. How will he lead an attack against me? His very heart has become the battle-field, leaving me free. The war is being waged on the enemy's field and I am quite secure. The enemy shall cease to exist. Gyandeo has said, "If the enemy dies of my friendship for him, why should we carry the burden of swords?"

"Love thy enemy"—what a valour these words imply! From where will a man gather courage if his very heart is weak? But we in our ignorance think that only he is strong who unsheathes his sword. The truth is that the moment we think of sword we become weak. Saint Tukaram says in a humorous vein," Oh, what to do? I would have given you a nice battle, but my hands are engaged in holding the sword and the shield. How can I fight then?"

An armed man can show his valour only against the disarmed; the moment he faces a better armed adversary, he loses heart. Where is bravery in it? We saw this happening in the last world war. Those who had initiated an

armed attack with a force of lacs, had atlast to throw away their arms and surrender. Why? Because the opponent was militarily better equipped. To start with, they made a great show of arms but subsequently better sense prevailed and they yielded, "Only he, who is armed with love, can keep up his valour till the end"

"Love thy enemy"—this alone is the right way of growth through resistance. The enemy harbours ill-will against me, and I resist him through love. From this the harmony of oneness is generated. This is Vedanta. The Quran says, "Try the weapon of friendship against your enemy. You will ultimately find that he is no more your enemy but has turned into your bosom friend!"

"Love thy enemy"—Does it mean that the wrong should not be resisted? The man who puts this question, has taken it for granted that only his enemy is the sinner and that so far as he is concerned, he is all virtue. This is wrong. Sin should be resisted wherever it appears, but beginning has to be made with himself, ending it with the enemy. To love a patient does not amount to loving his disease. Only the effort to cure the patient is the sign of love.

All this thinking appears correct to our mind and so the Christians have started an era in the name of Christ. It is for the same reason that Vedanta is held in high esteem in India, the Quran exercises such an authority on the Muslims, and the Japanese and the Chinese call themselves as followers of Buddha. But, unfortunately, none acts according to this thought. The question arises, why ?

We must search out the cause. The followers of all the religions and the advocates of non-violence hold their faith in high esteem and profess to be its followers, but they do not live upto it in their day-to-day life. Does it mean then that they are all pretenders and liars ? It will be uncharitable to imagine such a thing about human society. We should, therefore, find out the rationale of this strange behaviour.

There may be several reasons, but to my mind the Chief reason appears to be that the people labour under the delusion that what religion preaches is intended for the individual and not for the society. But presuming it to be so, do the individuals act according to its preachings ? It may be said in reply that there is certainly such an effort going on, but it is not fully successful and that the reason is that the

individual is so imperfect, so weak. But when it comes to applying the teachings to society, man is not inclined to believe that the teachings of religion can at all be applied to the collectivity, the social life. In this respect he still entertains doubts.

A student of Geometry never raises a doubt like this : "The theorem has been proved in the case of one triangle but how can it apply to other triangles ?" But such a doubt does arise in the minds of religious people. Until that is removed, we shall not be able to follow the Saints although we may honour them. We shall observe their birthdays, start eras in their name, glorify them and profess to be their followers, but we are not prepared to become their true followers. We even go to the extent of indulging in disturbances and waging wars in their names without any compunction. We do not feel that it is inconsistent with the profession of our faith. Such is the sorry plight in which we find ourselves.[5]

Chapter V

LET THERE BE KINGDOM OF GOD WITHIN TOO

A Christian Friend : What is the difference between the objective (social reconstruction) for which you have dedicated your life and the 'Kingdom of God' of which Lord Christ talked two thousand years back ?

Vinoba : Buddha too had conceived of a similar society before Christ, but it has not yet taken a concrete shape. Man seems to be thinking that his existence is confined only to his individual material body, but the Indian thought challenges this view. According to it, the life that pulsates in one man is also present in all others. I am endeavouring to approach people and change their hearts through the method of peace and humility. This may perhaps make them realize that the purpose of their life is to serve others. In fact, one should take food not for the satisfaction of the tongue, but for the purpose that the human machine continuously engaged in the service of others may work smoothly. Christ said that the Kingdom of God can

be achieved only through the Grace of God. I believe that the path advocated by him is worthy of adoption for all the people who are open to the Grace.

The Christian Friend : What according to you is the biggest weakness of the Christian churches and the Christians in India ?

Vinoba : I have an aversion for criticising others. In my humble opinion, their isolation is their biggest weakness. There is no doubt that Christ was a great soul, that he had to go through much suffering for carrying the message of God and had to lay down even his life at last. But even the Christians forgot this utterance of Christ, " There are many apartments in my house ".

There have been many saints in other countries too. Just as God precipitates rain in various lands of the world, so also He has sent His divine message through different saints born in different countries at different times. Religion aims at unity and not at creating divisions. Every Hindu and Muslim should be prepared to call himself a Christian. The Christians too should be prepared to accept the truth of other religions. They should not insist that they will pray se-

parately even though they may do all other work together. I receive letters from pious persons living in U.K. and other western countries to the effect that I am carrying on an admirable and good work. But I am also reminded therein of some extracts from the Bible conveying, " Salvation is possible only by turning to Christ ". It is not only the individuals who are responsible for isolation, but also the growth of dogmas and rigid institutions around religion. I hold that the basis of every religion is some deep inner experience alone. Every Christian, who has that will, naturally, like to share his experience about God and salvation with others. There is nothing wrong in it. But he should be eager at the same time to enrich his experience with that of other faiths.

The Christian Friend : What according to you is the good work that the Christian Churches have done in India ?

Vinoba : I hold that no church nor any other religious institutions have done any good work. The Church has only stunted the growth of intellect. I fully concede that Christians, missionaries and Indian Christians have rendered much useful service in India as individuals. Spe-

cially, they have served the poor and the deprived. The Christians were the first to take up the work for the service of the lepers. Had conversion not been the objective behind their acts of service, they would have done much more. Before the Christians began such humanitarian work, the ideal of service had been lying dormant among the Hindus. This initiative by the Christians helped in the revival of the service ideal in Hinduism.[6]

The Christian Friend : The Christians think that Sarvodaya ideology does not recognize the evil latent in the individual and the society, and that it is, therefore, likely to fail. What do you think about this view of theirs ?

Vinoba : The Sarvodaya does not give credence to the element of evil, but does recognize that of good. Good is much more powerful than evil, and the latter should be fought out ruthlessly. We should not be passive before it, and should be fully convinced that its defeat is certain. The evil needs no proof of its presence ; but the power of good is limitless and the former cannot stand before it.

The Christian Friend : The early followers of Christ sold off their personal property and exercised only collective ownership on the rem-

aining articles. In spite of that such institutions did not survive. Why ?

Vinoba : The cause of their failure was not renunciation of ownership but lack of initiative and absence of productive labour. The idea was not wrong, the method of putting it into practice was wrong. As such, others should come forward and put this idea into action in a right way.

A Voice from the Audience, "Will Christ re-appear ?

Vinoba : I suppose no Christian believes that Christ met death. The Saints never die and the evil persons never keep alive. Why should Christ take up another body ? Let us make this body of ours so pure that he may get entry there.

The Christian Friend : The majority of population in Kerala are Christians. What is your message for them ?

Vinoba : I have already said that the Christians should not live in isolation. I repeat the same thing, for you should allow me this freedom that I may live like a Christian even while remaining firm in my own convictions, and that I may be considered a good Christian

even while remaining a Hindu. Only then will I be able to imbibe the truth of your faith. Christ has said, "There are many apartments in the house of my Father". Let us also organize collective prayers, for one may have objection to a particular name, but none will object to silent prayer.

According to the Hindus, Rama is God. Why does the name 'Rama' scare you? Is it a symbol of Satan? Among the thousand names of Vishnu (God), two are 'Shabdatigah' and 'Shabdasahah'. If He endures, our words, why not you and I? Some orthodox Muslims objected even to Gandhiji's "Allah and Ishwar are Thy names". Just as 'water' and 'Pani' (Hindi equivalent for water) denote the same thing, so also Rama, God and Allah are the same entity. God is indescribable, beyond words.[7]

Chapter VI

ON THE PATH OF CHRIST

Christ laid the greatest stress on non-violence. What he had said was not new to India. Lord Buddha and the Vedic religion too had said the same thing here. But this must be admitted that Christ placed it more clearly before the world. We Indians fully believe in his teachings.

Christianity has now become the religion of India. It has been preached here for the last 1900 years. Today it has become a domicile of India. All religions have a right on India and India has welcomed every religion. It is a peculiarity of Hindu religion that it can sympathise all sorts of thoughts.

This does not mean that there is no scope left for modification in Hinduism or that it has attained a complete synthesis. There is still much to be improved in it. But we wholeheartily accept Lord Christ's teaching of non-enmity, non-violence and love.

But how can it be accepted that only those will be liberated who swear by Chirst's name. This is characteristic of Hinduism (and this

should be emulated by others) that it has equal regard for the name of Rama and Krishna, for, both have been taken as Avatars. Not only that, it recognizes even other Avatars and Great Persons. It does not insist that sole devotion to only a particular Avatar can bestow liberation. The Gita is a very great and important scripture of Hinduism. But it does not make it incumbent that it must be read. One is free to read Bhagwat or Ramayana in place of Gita. If, someone develops faith in the Upanishad, he too can attain salvation. I want to declare on behalf of Hinduism that if a person reads only the Bible and finds Truth, Non-violence etc. in that alone, Hinduism accepts even that. It does not insist any particular book of its several scriptures. Not only that it accepts even books of other religions, if by their help or with the help of some individual a person walks on the right path. This is the height of its generosity.

It is wholly wrong to believe that followers of only a particular faith are entitled to salvation. This insistence must go. This alone is right, all others are wrong—such a claim is a negation of liberation. As God is omnipresent He can be reached

by any path. Christ has himself declared that, He said, "I have built a mansion but there are other mansions too." He has gone even a step further, by saying, "Those who do not recite God's name but do my work, are my own comrades." Hinduism too believes in this. And as far as my understanding of Christ goes, I can say that he too was of the same view. I have studied the teachings of Christ with the same faith with which I studied the Vedas and the Upanishads. I have learnt by heart a major portion of the Bible. Similarly I have studied the Quran. Thereby I have not obliged anyone but myself. By this study my Hinduism has become lustrous, I have become a good Hindu. My interpretation of Islam too is the same. Islam says, "God has sent his messengers for every community and He makes no distinction between them." What a generous and broad out-look is this !

I am of the opinion that all the three religions *viz.* Hinduism, Christianity and Islam advocate this very tolerance. But there is a unique thing in Hinduism and the people here too believe in it. It is that a believer in Hinduism does not subscribe to the view that one doing a sacred work as directed by Islam or a person of character acting according to the teachings of Christ *cannot*

achieve salvation. He says only this that we too have inherited such knowledge and follow the paths shown by it.

The knowledge of God is not limited to only one pattern. God has infinite forms. Even the status of 'existence' as of non-existence is His form.

The element of tolerance is generally present in all religions. But it is a special feature of Hinduism and which I did not find in the scriptures of any other religion, that here the believer in God as well as non-believer in Him can be religious. Hinduism has six Darshanas (schools of philosophy). Some of them are such as refuse to believe the Creator as separate from the creation. It is a thing worth pondering over. To believe in the Creator or not depends upon one's power of imagination. But one who conducts himself on the path of religion and keeps his mind open in search of truth, will increasingly get enlightenment and march forward towards salvation. From the very beginning such a broad outlook has been there in this religion. That is why it does not find any difficulty in recognizing Islam and Christianity.

All religions believe in love, compassion, affection and peace, and in this respect they have

a common belief. Love and peace are the crying need of the hour. The world is passing through a very critical period today. If war breaks out, there can be an end of the whole world on account of nuclear weapons. The experiments in nuclear explosions are conducted on such a big scale that the whole atmosphere gets charged with radio-active dust. This can result in such dangerous consequences that the new born babies may be accompanied with disability and loss of limbs, that seasons may change, and that the air may be poisoned. It is painful to state that the countries that manufactured these bombs, made experiments and are still doing so, are generally speaking, almost all of them followers of Christianity.

Every year December 25 is observed as a peace day throughout the world. We see before our very eyes Christ shedding tears, while the people of Europe and U.S.A. drink in the name of Christ and enjoy. I know that the Hindus too behave in the same way on the occasion of their festivals.

I have not selected the Christians alone for my criticism, but what I want to drive at is that the followers of very religion which gave the message

of peace to the world, have opened the way to put an end to this world. And that is a bad thing.

It is my claim that the attempt to walk on the path of all of the Prophets is inherent in the Bhoodan ideology. Weapons of destruction are manufactured in order to solve the world's problems that have defied all attempts for their solution. People relied on violence to solve them but that has resulted in the manifestation of tremendous violence which can only bring about total destruction. None has any doubt about it. But they shall have faith in the power of love only when they see that problems are solved by that way. It is not sufficient to say that deadly weapons should be destroyed, but this too will have to be displayed that problems can be solved through love. To solve the problem of the landless by the Bhoodan Movement is only a minor thing. Its most important work is to show how the difficult problems of the world can be solved by love and peace.[8]

Chapter VII

CHRIST AND THE BHOODAN MOVEMENT

I have stated that India claims to be living upto the teachings of Christianity. I humbly claim one more thing. It is my conviction that we have the constant blessings of Lord Christ in our Bhoodan Movement. What has he taught us ? It is this that it is inhuman to live in isolation from our neighbour and not to identify ourselves with his pains and pleasures. Only on the strength of this thought can we abolish the present ownership on land and wealth. To claim ownership or possession is to betray greed, lack of faith, and nihilism. The word 'Ishwar' means Supreme, Master, Lord. Islam calls Him as 'Malik', Christianity as 'Lord', and Hinduism as 'Prabhu'. All the three words connote the same meaning that God is the Lord, the Master, the Supreme. If, inspite of that, we claim ownership, it amounts to blasphemy, denial of God. Till today the concept of ownership has remained a recognized way with humanity, but this recognition must go now. It would

not serve the purpose in this age of science if we merely display some pity and perform acts of mercy or show some affection for others, but retain the sight of ownership. Time has come when you must extend your love wholly and unreservedly. Nanak says, " I have realized the Whole and sing the attributes of the Whole. The Supreme Whole is nameless and His name is Whole."

Half-hearted love will not do now. Kabir too has said, "I have realized the Whole, I see the Sahib (the Lord) everywhere."

These are the examples of full or perfect realization. When this comes about, only then can we love truly and wholly. Partial realization in this age of science will not serve our purpose.

Some people say that the age of science will destroy faith. But I hold a different view. I believe that science will make the faith (in God) complete and true. The path of devotion that has remained incomplete till now will attain perfection in this age.

ESTABLISHMENT OF COLLECTIVE OWNERSHIP

We should not replace individual ownership with a collective one. The word, " commu-

nist' is a gift from the followers of Christ. They used to live in 'communes' and relinquished all personal property. This ideal is claimed to have found recognition in India too.

A story is current in Tamilnad : It runs as under :—There lived a devotee in a small room. It had a very little space in it. It had been raining outside when someone knocked at the door requesting for permission to get in for shelter. The devotee said, "Yes, come in. The room has the capacity to provide accomodation for one man to sleep, but it is sufficient for two to sit". The fellow got in and both took their seat. After a short while, a third man came. It was still raining. The devotee said, "Please you too come in. One can sleep here, two can sit, but three can stand." He too was taken in. All the three stood up.

Thousands of such stories are current in India.

NUMBERLESS SAINTS

We are indebted to God that He sent numberless saints to this country. It is because of this that this land has become holy. In those days too India produced a number of saints when it was considered a fallen nation *i.e.* was held in

contempt for the sin of bondage under the British. They had been the persons whose message was accepted throughout the world subsequently.

MESSAGE OF CHRIST : Our Heritage

It is God's Grace that Islam, Christianity and Parsi religion came to India and Buddhism spread to other countries. Preacherslcss of Buddhism didnot go out with sword in hand, nor did they talk of ruling over them. They only talked of spiritual knowledge. There is not a single instance in the recorded history of five thousand years (its unknown history is pretty long) of India's past when it made aggression on any other country. For such a country, the message of Christ will be taken as a heritage. Looking to the wide acceptance of non-violence here deep devotion to God by people everywhere and their fascination for His name, acceptance of Christ by India is no surprise. No doubt, our doings have been wrong, for which we ask pardon from the Lord we hope. He will forgive us. If Christ forgave his executor, why will He not pardon us ? God is all-forgiving. (I do not say that we are virtuous, we are great sinners). The idea is essentially true. It

is thus apparent that India is quite receptive to the message of Christ.

HUMANITY AND COMPASSION FOR THE WHOLE CREATION

Christ was born in a stable. He preached the message of service to humanity. It is difficult to find an equivalent of "Humanity" in the terminology of our scriptures. Nor that there is no word for it in our language, but 'humanity' does not comprise a complete thought. In our Books we use the term 'Bhootadaya' *i.e.* compassion for the Whole Creation which includes 'compassion for humanity'. This shows that we are open to the message of Christ.

BHOODAN : A WORK OF CHRIST

I note with pleasure that all belonging to the Church of Malabar have declared that the mission of Bhoodan-Yagna bears the message of Christ. It is my claim that his message will reach every home through this movement, Christ said that a name had no significance. What does it matter if someone calls himself a Hindu, Muslim or Christian ? Islam means peace. Moon is Islam's ideal, which denotes peace. How can one who has no compassion and peace in his thought and action, be called a Muslim ? It is

for this reason that Christ said, "He who feeds a hungry person offers food to God ; he who gives water to a thirsty person, offers water to God ; he who gives clothe to a person shivering with cold, offers clothe to the Lord. He did not know of any distinction, of religion, sect, community etc. As I said at the start, he was a son of man and in the same spirit I have initiated this Bhoodan movement. Humanity shall blossom forth from it.[3]

THE LAST MESSAGE : LOVE ONE ANOTHER

On the last day of his terrestrial existence Christ called all of his disciples near him and said, "Come, let us talk of love". He asked them to sit down, took a wet handkerchief and cleaned their feet, saying, "You are my Master. I am rendering services to you. Serve the people in the same way. Like me be humble, and considering yourself as the dust of the feet of the people, serve them. Treat this as my teaching in practice". The disciples were nonplussed, but had to sit silent as they could not disobey the Master. After a little pause Christ spoke again, "Till today, I used to preach love for your neighbour, for your enemy, but today

I ordain you for love one another. Go with your hearts united. When the people hear a note of concord, they will feel fulfilled.[10]

THE SPARKLING FERVOUR OF CHRIST'S DISCIPLES

We daily offer collective prayers. This imparts a sense of spiritual friendship. It is a common experience that by dining together mutual love is fostered ; in a way eating is a physical process. Those who gather together for prayers consume a common mental food. Friendship grows by this process too. Spiritual Friendship results from fusion of ideas, convictions, feelings, aspirations. And this is the real friendship.

Some of Christ's disciples were not much educated and were either carpenters, peasants or ordinary villagers. But after the passing away of Christ, harmony and oneness came in their lives and they worked whole heartedly with great gusts, immense drive and rare courage. As a result, many powerful and valiant kings of Europe accepted Christianity. Several of the disciples were even killed but they did not lose the sparkling fervour. That batch of his disciples has been inspiring the human society till today.

The question arises as to how friendship of such a high level among the Christ's disciples came about. The reply is that they drank deep at the same source, that they had a common ideology. Only because of this friendship resulting from co-thinking, they could work with unabated zeal for such a long period.[11]

MEANING OF BHOODAN

Christ preached love for the neighbour. All know this, but do not generally act according to it. We advocate Khadi, and talk of Bhoodan. What does it all amount to ? This is nothing but an extension of the message of Christ, ' Love thy neighbour '. The neighbour is landless, we share our land with him. He will thereby be able to maintain his family and this will result in the happiness of all. If we care for the neighbour and help each other the whole country will be strengthened. Nothing can excel this strength. India is made up of small villages ; if they come forward to the aid of one another, live as members of one family, then all of these villagers will become formidable like little invincible citadels.

' X-Mas ' is celebrated today throughout the world, but the very followers of Christ are multiplying destructive weapons in their countries out

of fear for one another. U.S.A. is afraid of Russia and *vice versa.* The same fear prevails between India and Pakistan. If we continue fearing each other and increasing arms, certainly, no good can come to the poor ; a nation can become fully armed only at the cost of the weaker sections of society. But I hope that a day will surely come when people will act according to the message of Christ, it will produce concrete results.

In spite of Christ's invaluable contribution for the good of humanity, we put him on the Cross ; in spite of what the apostle of non-violence did for us, we shot him down. This has been our attitude towards the great souls and yet they had nothing but love for humanity. When Christ was crucified, he suffered immense pain. He did not die all at once but struggled between life and death for 3-4 days. Even during this acute suffering his only prayer to God was, "They are ignorant, forgive them my Lord." Such was the quality of his love. There is no doubt that his love will not go in vain. In this atomic age, when deadly weapons are fabricated on an unprecedented scale, I am pleased, I feel that the days of petty wars are over. There are

the times of Great Wars, *i.e.* an era of non-violence is to set in, because science has progressed much. If violence is allowed on an extensive scale, man is doomed for ever. As this realization sinks in, people will have to reverse their steps. They persued violence till today ; now they will turn to non-violence with the same vehemence. I hold this conviction and that is why I am not afraid of a Great War.

The Bhoodan movement conceives of changing the society through peaceful means. Its speciality lies not in the sharing of land but in that it is being shared with love. The world is looking at this movement in the great hope that India is solving its economic problems non-violently and peacefully. One wants, the other offers. We wield no authority nor do we want that ; we do not even have faith in its efficacy. Our strength lies in love. Several persons doubt if India attained independence through non-violence. But is there any doubt that Bhoodan work is being accomplished through non-violence alone ? I am executing what Mahatma Gandhi and Christ had willed. They said, "Love your neighbour." I go from village to village and ask for land in love. The

miracle is that people give ; it is immaterial that some give less on account of age-old attachment to land. But they give all the same.

And I am convinced that this way alone will dawn 'the Kingdom of Heaven on earth' as conceived by Christ.[12]

APPENDIX : I

Gandhi Says

Asking for forgiveness means that we should not sin again, and the grant of forgiveness means that we would have power to resist all temptation. It is only after a persistent, untiring effort that God comes to our rescue as a wall of protection and there is a growing consciousness that we shall not sin.

Young India 22-12-'27

× × ×

If we follow the law of Love, we shall not bear any hatred towards the irreligious brother. On the contrary, we shall love him and therefore either we shall bring him to see the error of his ways, or he will point out our error, or each will tolerate the other's difference of opinion. If the other party does not observe the law of Love, he may be violent to us. If, however, we cherish real love for him, it will overcome his bitterness in the end. All obstacles in our path will vanish, if only we observe the golden rule that we must not be impatient with those whom we may consider to be in error, but must be prepared, if need be, to suffer in our own person.

Yarvada Mandir, ch. X & XI

× × ×

we are all children of the same God. " Verily, verily I say unto you, not everyone that sayeth unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter the Kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven shall enter the Kingdom", was said, though in different words, by all the great teachers of the world.

—Harijan, 18-4-'36

× × ×

All the great religions are fundamentally equal. we must have the innate respect for other religions as we have for our own. Mind you, not mutual toleration, but equal respect.

—Harijan, 28-11-'36

× × ×

Spiritual life is infinitely superior to the beautiful and fragrant rose, and I make bold to say that the moment there is a spiritual expression in life, the surroundings will readily respond.

—Harijan, 12-12-'36

× × ×

To live the gospel is the most effective way—most effective in the beginning, in the middle and in the end.

—Harijan, 29-3-'35

× × ×

Let your life speak to us, even as the rose needs no speech but simply spreads its perfume. Even

the blind who do not see the rose perceive its fragrance. That is the secret of the gospel of the rose. But the gospel that Jesus preached is more subtle and fragrant than the gospel of the rose.

—Harijan 17-4-'37

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If I had to face only the Sermon on the Mount and my own interpretation of it, I should not hesitate to say, 'Oh yes, I am a Christian'.

—Young India 8-12-'27

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APPENDIX : II

References

1. Hereketur	Dharwar	Mysore	25.12.57
2. Rajganj	Manbhum	Bengal	25.12.54
3. Sagardidhi	Murshidabad	Bengal	26.12.52
4. ..	Kamroop	Assam	25. 7.62
5. Paramdham (Pavnar)	Wardha	Maharashtra	5. 1.47
6. Gopinayakampatti	Madurai	Madras	24. 3.57
7. Puliampatti	Madurai	Madras	23. 3.57
8. Amaraoti	Krishna	Andhra	25.12.55
9. Rajganj	Manbhum	Bengal	25.12.54
10. Muzaffarpur	Muzaffarpur	Bihar	3. 1.54
11. Kashi Vidyapith	Varanasi	U. P.	18. 8.52
12. Madhubani	Darbhanga	Bihar	24.12.53